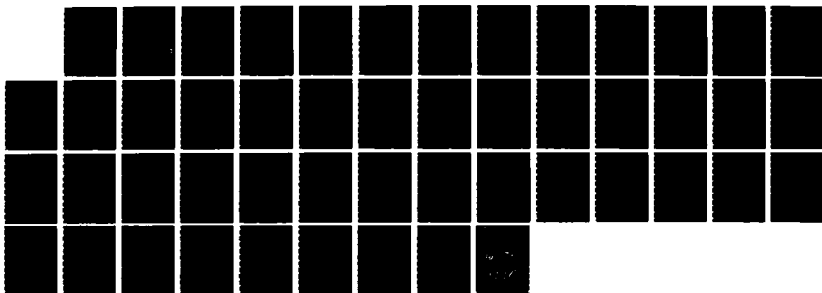
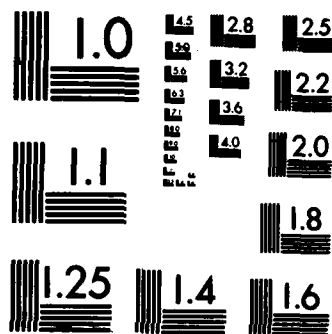


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Distinctions Between Tactical and Operational  
Levels of War -- Are Some More  
Important Than Others?

AD-A174 243

by

Major Charles T. Crenshaw III

Infantry

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# ABSTRACT

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## I. Introduction

The concept of the operational level of war, though disguised behind several aliases over the years such as grand tactics, military strategy, or operational art, was not a new idea conceived in the 1982 version of FM 100-5, Operations. Quite the contrary, the designing of large unit operations or campaigns to achieve national goals through the sequencing of smaller tactical battles certainly was understood and practiced by Napoleon in the early 1800's. In fact, the emperor's greatest contribution to the art of war was probably in the area of operations, frequently called grand tactics. (1)

By the close of the nineteenth century, several military writers, including Clausewitz and Jomini, had acknowledged the existence of this operational level of war between tactics and strategy. They conducted systematic studies of the subject and began integrating it into doctrine.

Later, during World War II and the Korean War, many commanders on both sides also demonstrated a thorough knowledge in this area. Specifically, General Patton's 90 degree turning movement and rapid maneuver by Third Army to relieve the 101st Airborne Division at Bastogne provides an excellent example of operational art. Several years later, during the Korean War, MacArthur's Inchon landing deep into the operational depth of the North Koreans as they closed in on the Pusan perimeter is another example. Both of these noted American commanders evidenced mastery of an operational level of war, even though

this level of war was not formally documented in U. S. doctrine of the period. In the case of the Germans, Field Marshal Erich von Manstein excelled as an operational commander. His mobile defense on the Eastern Front in the winter of 1943 enabled his smaller Southern Army Group to steal the initiative from the attacking Soviet force. In their doctrine, the Germans called the operational level of war the "operativ" level. (2)

Unfortunately, the study of large unit operations by the U. S. Army generally ended during the period following World War II, without operational concepts having been developed or documented. Thus, we have stumbled along for 35 or so years, failing to define the relationship between tactics and strategy until the operational level of war was reintroduced in the late 1970's and formally accepted in 1982 with the publication of that year's version of FM 100-5, Operations. Since that time, the operational level of war has become a relatively common term throughout the U.S. Army, but the concept is not yet widely understood. Part of the problem is understanding the distinction between the tactical and operational levels, and the linkages which connect one to the other. In other words, what functions contribute more to enabling operational commanders to translate tactical outcomes into operational successes?

The hypothesis of this paper is that a few key distinctions exist between the tactical and operational levels of war, which, if understood and emphasized in our operational doctrine, would significantly enhance our fighting ability. While FM 100-5 suggests many distinctions between these two levels of war, a

review of historical examples of large unit operations during World War II should reveal the most important distinctions. Specifically, these key distinctions are in the areas of intelligence, planning, maneuver, and sustainment. By reviewing these areas we can gain a better understanding of the structure of war at the tactical and operational levels.

This paper will investigate distinctions between the tactical and operational levels of war. Initially, levels of war will be defined in accordance with current U. S. Army doctrine, primarily FM 100-5, Operations, the Army's principal operations manual. Then the functional areas of sustainment, intelligence, planning, and maneuver will be examined. Two case studies from World War II, one from North Africa with focus on the British Eighth Army and one from the Eastern Front with focus on the German Southern Army Group, will be studied. Tactical outcomes will be evaluated against such criteria as friendly losses in men and equipment versus enemy losses in the same categories, terrain gained or lost, and possibly time invested. Operational success or failure will be determined based on the degree to which strategic goals were achieved. Through this process, the most significant differences between these two levels, at least in these specific case studies, should be demonstrated. These distinctions originating from actual campaign experiences can then be compared to those which were suggested in a recent operational level map exercise. Thus, through this methodology, a comparison will be made between actual experiences and published doctrine.

The significance of this study is that recognition of these four key functional areas provides the most meaningful framework for analyzing the tactical and operational levels of war. With this framework, individuals will be better able to master the significant differences between these two levels of war.

## II. Distinctions Between Tactical and Operational Levels of War as Suggested in Current U. S. Army Doctrine

Current U. S. Army doctrine recognizes three levels of war: strategy, operational art, and tactics. Military strategy is "the art and science of employing the armed forces of a nation or alliance to secure policy objectives by the application or threat of force." (3) It establishes goals in the theater of operations and provides available assets. Operational art is "the employment of military forces to attain strategic goals in a theater of war or theater of operations through the design, organization, and conduct of campaigns and major operations." (4) It involves decisions concerning when and where to fight. Basically, commanders at this level must answer three questions:

(1) "What military condition must be produced in the theater of war or operations to achieve the strategic goal?

(2) What sequence of actions is most likely to produce that condition?

(3) How should the resources of the force be applied to accomplish that sequence of actions?" (5)

Finally, tactics is the art by which small unit commanders apply available combat power to achieve victories in battles and engagements. (6)

The manual defines each of the three separate and distinct levels of war in easily understood terms. However, the structure of war being as complicated as it is, we still often experience problems accurately differentiating between the

tactical and operational levels of war. To understand fully this structure, we must understand how the different levels relate to each other.

While U. S. Army doctrine, specifically FM 100-5, does not attempt to provide a laundry list of functions differentiating these two levels, many differences are scattered throughout the text of the manual. The manual points out that the four basic tenets --initiative, agility, depth, and synchronization-- are present at both levels.(7) Taking this a step further, the manual shows how the application of each tenet differs at each level. Similarly, the four elements of combat power --maneuver, firepower, protection, and leadership-- are also said to exist at both levels.

While the above basic tenets and elements of combat power apply at both levels, they alone do not adequately differentiate between the tactical and operational levels of war. The understanding they provide might enhance one's general overall knowledge of the the two levels, but does not insure a total grasp, so essential to practitioners of war, of the most critical differences between the two levels. A more substantial structure exemplifying the differences between these two levels of war is provided by the following four functional areas: sustainment, intelligence, planning, and maneuver.

Battles at the tactical level and campaigns at the operational level will often be limited in both design and execution by the support structure and the resources available.(8) Tactical level support focuses on support of

units in operations, while operational level support focuses on support for operations. Tactical level sustainment must insure support for the main effort and for the associated close, deep, and rear operations. This support to units includes ammunition, fuel, food, water, maintenance, transportation, personnel services, and medical support. Inherent in tactical sustainment is a large degree of flexibility to insure continuous logistical support as the tactical situation constantly changes.

Operational sustainment, on the other hand, "extends from the theater sustaining base or bases which link strategic to theater support functions, to the forward CSS units and facilities organic to major tactical formations." (9) Because the distances involved at this level are generally significantly greater than at the tactical level, a more in-depth understanding of the relationship between time, LOC extension, and forward combat power is essential. (10) Ground, air, and sea lines of communications may be utilized. As these lines of communications become overextended during the campaign, staging of sustaining bases forward may be required to insure continued support to combat forces. These lines of communications should be located so that shifts in operational direction to exploit unexpected opportunities or to block an enemy effort can be accommodated as efficiently as possible. (11) Thus, operational CSS planners must constantly anticipate future changes to the operation. While their focus may not be on insuring ammunition is delivered to specific units for the current battle, the overall logistics posture of the force is a concern, and

anticipation of and proper sustainment planning for the arrival of an armored division of M1's and M2's in theater at some future time would be an operational sustainment concern. These planners require a broad vision and the ability to grasp ideas as complicated as a theater of operations and how it should be supported.

Intelligence is another function which must be performed at both the tactical and operational levels of war. At the tactical level the focus is on numbers, types, mobility, morale, and enemy equipment. At the operational level, intelligence becomes more subjective as enemy intentions, doctrine, personalities, and idiosyncrasies of enemy senior commanders, and enemy air and naval capabilities are considered also. (12) Therefore intelligence appears to represent a significant linkage also.

Detailed planning is absolutely essential at these two levels of war. Tactical planning usually begins with the assignment of a mission or with the commander's recognition of a requirement and continues through mission accomplishment. (13) The focus of tactical planning is the scheme of maneuver and the plan of fire support. On the other hand, operational planning begins when the theater commander receives strategic guidance. Planning at this level concentrates on the design of campaigns and major operations. Campaign plans are usually phased and set long-term goals such as control of a large geographic area, reestablishment of political boundaries, or defeat of enemy forces. (14)

Maneuver, the movement of forces in relation to the enemy to maintain or gain positional advantage, also occurs at both the tactical and operational levels of war. Tactical maneuver seeks to set the terms of combat in battles and engagements. At this level, through maneuver, the commander can gain and sustain the initiative, exploit success, preserve freedom of action, and reduce vulnerability of friendly forces. (15) Operational maneuver involves large units seeking to gain positional advantage before battle. It requires anticipation of friendly and enemy actions well beyond the current battle. (16)

The operational level of war and its linkages to the tactical level of war represent a complicated concept-- one with which many of us are not yet comfortable. We still prefer concepts or ideas which are neat and systematic and therefore can be reviewed or evaluated by use of a checklist. This insistence on neatness probably contributed to U.S. Army doctrine writers' suggestions that basically those tenets, elements of combat power, and other numerous functions found at the tactical level are also present at the operational level in some form. This idea notwithstanding, this author believes that the primary functions which transcend the tactical level into the operational level are in the areas of intelligence, planning, maneuver, and sustainment and that these functional areas provide a meaningful framework for future study.

### III. Battle of El Alamein, July-November, 1942

#### Background of the Campaign

In February, 1941, Hitler ordered Lieutenant-General Erwin Rommel to Tripoli with three German divisions, two armored and one infantry, to aid the desperate, retreating Italian forces under Marshal Rodolfo Graziani. (17) Rommel's mission was a conservative one of conducting a successful defense of Italian holdings in North Africa to accomplish Germany's primary strategic aim of keeping their Italian allies in the war. On the other hand, the British aim was to defeat the Italian forces and retain Britain's base of operations in the Mediterranean. (18)

Despite Hitler's instructions to defend, Rommel immediately attacked eastward and by June, when Hitler launched Operation "Barbarossa" on the Eastern Front, Rommel had set up defenses west of Sollum near the Libyan-Egyptian border, having bypassed Tobruk. At this time, the initiative shifted to the British who forced Rommel's Panzergruppe Afrika back to El Agheila by the end of the year. (19)

By January 1942, British forces were therefore postured in a wide defensive front in the vicinity of Gazala as Rommel received reinforcements further to the west and again planned to attack east. His major objective was to take Tobruk and ultimately drive the British out of Egypt. Following several months of only small engagements with dispersed British forces, Rommel smashed through British positions at Gazala and continued

eastward to take Tobruk on June 21, 1942. The following week Rommel attacked two British corps in Mersa Matruh driving the demoralized British further east to El Alamein thus setting the stage for that important battle. (20)

### Opposing Forces

By September 1942, Montgomery's British Eighth Army, composed of three corps (two infantry and one armored) enjoyed a manpower superiority of three to one over Rommel's depleted Panzerarmee. Actual figures were estimated at 230,000 British troops compared to the enemy's 77,000 of which only 27,000 were German. Tank ratios were similar, as the British had approximately 1400 tanks to fight 500 enemy tanks, only 200 of which were German. In other words, if one discounted the generally inferior Italian tanks, the tank strength comparison would have approached six to one. Likewise, the British enjoyed significant advantages in artillery and aircraft. Only in antitank guns did Rommel's forces in the static defense approach the number of systems of the British, approximately 1000 compared to 1450. (21)

Logistically the two sides were also very unevenly matched. The British Eighth Army generally received all supplies which it requested. While their overall lines of communications from Great Britain were long, they were unbroken and provided a steady flow of reinforcements in both men and materials. In the upcoming battle in which supply capabilities would play such an

important role, Montgomery knew that he held the advantage. Quite the contrary, the German supply lines from Italy across the Mediterranean were uncertain and getting more dangerous every day. Thus, the Panzerarmee on the eve of the battle had only enough fuel for eleven days of normal consumption --let alone battle requirements-- and ammunition for only nine days.(22) Hence, some have claimed that Rommel and his forces were handcuffed from the start.

#### German and British Plans

German forces were still smarting from the one-week Battle of Alam Halfa in early September when Rommel had tried to seize the initiative by attacking the British despite his limited resources. With only 200 German and 243 Italian tanks compared to 767 British tanks, Rommel's forces had attacked through the Eighth Army's prepared minefields between Ruweisat and the Qattara Depression.(23) Unlike previous desert battles when Rommel had generally earned success through locating and subsequently attacking exposed British flanks, the sea in the north and the depression in the south precluded utilization of these tactics. After limited progress, the Germans were stopped and forced to retreat back to their original positions of the previous week.

Because of these recent setbacks, Rommel was forced to fight a static defense across the bottleneck between El Alamein and the Qattara Depression, which was exactly what Montgomery expected him to do. Fortunately, the Germans had prepared a

defense in depth of strongpoints, minefields, and other traps. Although only five miles in depth, this depth was probably all that his 100,000 infantry troops could cover across the 40-mile front. To the rear Rommel disposed his panzer divisions in two groups, one in the north and the other in the south. (24)

Montgomery's plan to penetrate the 500,000 German mines specified a main effort by his XXX Corps (infantry) in the northern sector to penetrate German defenses cutting two lanes in the minefields. X Corps (1st and 10th Armored Divisions) would then follow the infantry, and having penetrated the minefields, would establish defensive positions to hold off counterattacks by German tanks to allow infantry units to wheel north and south to begin systematic destruction of bypassed infantry units still occupying positions. A supporting attack by Montgomery's XIII Corps was planned in the southern sector and an elaborate deception plan was developed to persuade the defenders that the main effort would be in the south. (25)

#### Execution and Results of Battle

As planned, the British Eighth Army kicked off its attack on the evening of October 23, 1942, with XXX Corps (infantry) leading. However, the further units advanced, the more dense grew Rommel's wire, mines, and machine-gun positions. Despite limited resources, the Desert Fox had planned well in that just as the attackers grew tired and began losing their cohesion in the darkness, they were negotiating the very strongest defenses. Not surprisingly, after two days of fighting, lanes for the

British armored units still had not been cleared. Montgomery's solution was to order the Armored Division commander of the X Corps, General Lumsden, to force a penetration in the minefield with his tanks. Strong opposition from Lumsden finally convinced the Eighth Army commander to alter his order by requiring only one tank regiment to attempt such a dangerous penetration without infantry support. This adjustment was fortunate for the British, because, as predicted, the attacking regiment lost all but fifteen of its forty-three tanks as the Germans won the first round of the battle. (26)

On October 27, 1942, Rommel ordered his 15th and 21st Panzer divisions to attack and drive the British out of the salient which they had forged in the German position. However, from their temporary defensive positions, the British were able, with minimal losses, to repel the attackers. This move by Rommel probably not only depleted his forces unnecessarily, but also served to boost the morale of the British at a time when such encouragement was needed.

On November 2, 1942, Montgomery launched his last grand attack with 800 tanks and 360 guns advancing on the exhausted, outnumbered Germans. (27) At this point Rommel knew that his defeat was inevitable, but he hoped to delay the Eighth Army long enough to enable his German infantry to escape. Despite low fuel and ammunition, he accomplished this task through superb tactics and because of the British hesitation and excess caution in pursuing German forces. On November 4, 1942, the British finally broke through Rommel's remaining twenty-two

tanks deployed in front of his 90th Light Division and his fighting withdrawal ended. Rommel's losses were approximately 2300 killed, 5500 wounded, and 36,000 prisoners. (28)

### INTELLIGENCE

Just prior to El Alamein, in the area of tactical intelligence, the British were aware that Rommel had significantly dissipated his mobile reserves. In numbers of personnel, tanks, and guns, the British enjoyed advantages. Additionally, the openness of the desert and British familiarity with the terrain allowed them to anticipate Rommel's defense across the bottleneck between El Alamein and the Qattara Depression. This type of intelligence provided the British a focus for tactical operations. The Germans, on the other hand, were generally aware of these same figures and therefore were forced into a defense in depth.

While this information is also of interest at the operational level, Montgomery's focus was on his opposing operational commander, Rommel, since at this level campaigns can be loosely likened to a duel between commanders. Montgomery knew of Rommel's propensity for the attack, particularly on exposed British flanks. These German attacks were frequently conducted despite long and poorly protected lines of communications. This operational intelligence concerning Rommel combined with the tactical intelligence comparing numbers of personnel, tanks, etc., indicated to Montgomery that (1) Rommel would be forced into a defense in depth with which he was not

comfortable, and (2) Montgomery could win through a deliberate battle of attrition. From the German perspective, Rommel was aware that Montgomery was new to the desert theater and probably was aware somewhat of Montgomery's insistence on a simple and conservative plan for an operation.

### PLANS

Under these circumstances, the British tactically would fight a battle of attrition with lead infantry divisions penetrating the depth of the German minefields. Operationally, Montgomery hoped to convert initial tactical gains into an opportunity for maneuver by his X Corps of two armored divisions into the depth of the German defenses to disrupt and destroy lines of communications. With a strategic aim of demonstrating a quick (within twelve days) British victory prior to U.S. troops landing in North Africa in November, such a maneuver should demonstrate to the British public the resolve and strength of the British Eighth Army.

In opposition to the British attack would be a German force both tactically and operationally on the defensive. Depleted forces and equipment combined with long and threatened lines of communications essentially offered no other alternative. Even the positioning of Rommel's two panzer divisions in reserve in two different sectors, which normally would be used together to conduct an operational counterattack, was dictated by severe fuel problems. Rommel had either to accept and fight

Montgomery's battle of attrition, and lose, or give up favorable terrain and not fight at all.

### MANEUVER

Tactically for the British, the initial days of XXX Corps attempting to penetrate the minefields were disastrous. While Montgomery had anticipated a battle of attrition by the lead infantry units, the lanes through the minefields had to be opened and initially they were not. Therefore by the second day, Montgomery ordered his armored units to attempt the penetration without infantry support. The result was significant dissipation of his armor lessening his future chances for a deep armored penetration. Had Rommel at this point continued to contain the British using only his frontline troops, operationally, the British might have been crippled. However, Rommel impulsively committed his two reserve divisions piecemeal and they were depleted by the British who were occupying temporary defensive positions. This appears to have been Rommel's culminating point and from this time on, the British would gain the upper hand at El Alamein.

### SUSTAINMENT

During the Battle of El Alamein, the British enjoyed a substantial advantage in logistical support. Their tactical lines of communications in the immediate area and their operational lines of communications running back through Cairo could be protected by the Royal Air Force. While these lines

were lengthy, they were secure and did provide steady reinforcements in men and materials. These lines of communications were very capable of supporting Montgomery's plan for a deliberate attack over a 12-day period.

The German support structure was less secure. The tactical lines of communications over the land were constantly attacked by British air. Additionally, the operational lines of communications across the Mediterranean were uncertain and getting more dangerous everyday. Consequently, the Germans were short in both fuel and ammunition for the battle.

#### IV. The Eastern Front; Manstein's Counter Offensive, February-March, 1943

##### Background of the Campaign

While Rommel was begging for supplies in North Africa in June 1941, Hitler launched Operation "Barbarossa" against the Russians. His plan called for a two-phased campaign. In the first phase, Russian forces would be encircled and destroyed as close to the Russian-Polish frontier as possible. All remnants of Soviet forces then would be destroyed in the second phase. In this manner, the Germans expected to defeat the largest country in the world in only eight to twelve weeks. Three army groups would participate in the invasion, one attacking toward Leningrad in the north, one toward Smolensk in the center, and one toward Kiev in the south. (29) As events proved, Hitler drastically underestimated the determination of the Russians and the vast problems inherent in attacking over such a large area.

While initially Soviet equipment and tactics were relatively primitive, the Soviets made tremendous progress during 1941 and 1942 as German forces attacked deeper into the country. By 1943, the Soviets had experienced a remarkable maturation in both the tactical and operational levels of war. They had developed tank armies composed of two tank and one mechanized corps containing over 700 tanks. (30) They had gained valuable experience in fighting Germans and had been successful in institutionalizing this knowledge. Their offensive operations were characterized by penetrations and subsequent

maneuvers to encircle the enemy. (31) The principal strategic aim of the Soviets was to secure and maintain the initiative by using all types of operations, by careful employment of forces in critical directions, and by judicious use of strategic reserves. (32)

### Opposing Forces

In January, 1943, on the Eastern Front, the Second Hungarian Army and the Second German Army, both of Army Group B, were dealt serious blows by Golikov's Voronezh Front assisted by flanking formations of Reiter's Bryansk Front to the north and Vatutin's South-West Front to the south. As a result of this assistance from the flanks, the Soviets were able to concentrate approximately 200 guns and mortars per mile on each of the main assault frontages. The Hungarians believed that the Soviets had expended their strength or reached their culminating point and therefore could not attack. (33) As a result, by January 15, these Axis defenses were penetrated and just three days later the Soviet Third Tank Army and the 40th Army linked-up at Alexeievka surrounding most of Second Hungarian Army and some other smaller elements. (34) The southern flank of Second German Army was thus wide open and on January 28, 1943, the 40th Army moved northward to Kastornoye across the German lines of communications to join the 13th Army of the Bryansk Front. Even though some elements of these German units survived and made the long 120-mile march west to Rylsk, a 200-mile gap now existed between Kluge's Army Group Center and Manstein's Army Group Don, a gap that could easily be exploited by units of the Soviet

South-West Front. It was under these circumstances that the Soviets developed plans for Operation Star.

#### Soviet and German Plans

According to the Soviet plan, elements of the Voronezh Front would destroy enemy forces defending in the Tim, Oskol, Volokonovka, and Valiuki areas, rout German operational reserves, and advance to secure Kursk, Belgorod, and Kharkov. The main front concentration (40th, 69th, and 3rd Tank Armies) would attack on a broad front initially, and as the operation developed, they would converge to the southwest toward Kharkov. Kharkov would be enveloped from the west and south. Then while the 38th Army advanced in the direction of Prokhorovka to drive German forces westward and protect the front's right flank, the 60th Army would launch a secondary attack from the Kastornoye area to Kursk. Thus, the operation would achieve a depth of 200-250 kilometers, bringing Soviet forces to a line from Rakitnoye through Graivoron, Bogodukhov and Lyubotin, to Merefa. (35) The Germans, on the other hand, were still forced to give ground grudgingly because of Hitler's insistence that no territory be given up.

#### Execution and Results of Battle

The Soviets attacked as planned with the Voronezh Front moving almost due west toward Kursk and Kharkov while Sixth Army and First Guards Army of the South-West Front advanced toward Mariupol on the Sea of Azov. Manstein's lines of communications

were therefore seriously threatened. Hitler agreed to a partial withdrawal from the Caucasus, but Army Group A was not yet allowed fully to withdraw.

On February 6, Kluge and Manstein met with Hitler and convinced him to allow a withdrawal behind the Mius and give up the Rzhev Salient. Approximately a week later on February 17, Manstein again met with Hitler. At this meeting Manstein proposed to mount a counter-offensive against the current Soviet envelopment. (36) Even though Hitler was still smarting from the unauthorized surrender of Kharkov and regarded its reoccupation as his immediate aim rather than destruction of enemy forces, he did reluctantly agree to Manstein's proposal.

On the morning of February 19, Second SS Panzer Corps attacked the flank of the Soviet Sixth Army from the area of Krasnograd, punching a 25-mile wide hole through which the SS Das Reich scattered Fourth Guard Rifle Corps in disorder. (37) Three days later on February 22, 48th Panzer Corps and 57th Panzer Corps, while moving toward Pavlograd were able to cut off many Soviet troops and join the SS Corps. As a result, Army Group South claimed 23,000 enemy dead on the battlefield. (38) Forward elements of Popov's Tank Group were destroyed by 40th Panzer Corps between Krasnoarmeiskoye and Barvenkovo. Despite these aggressive operational maneuvers and resultant Soviet losses, the Soviet High Command continued to interpret this counter-offensive as a cover operation for the withdrawal of Manstein's Army Group South from the Mius back to the west of the Dnieper and therefore continued attacking.

At this point, Hoth's Fourth Panzer Army, now 150 miles north of its original position, took two days to regroup, outflanked South-West Front from the north, and launched a heavy attack between Merefa and Sokolovo. A 30-mile gap opened between the Soviet 69th Army and 3rd Tank Army and the Germans were fighting in the streets of Kharkov by March 12. Belgorod was also taken six days later on March 18. Finally, realizing that German maneuvers were not merely covering a withdrawal, 3rd Tank Army was ordered to break out of the encirclement near Kharkov and the Voronezh and South-West Fronts fell back approximately 40 miles to the east behind the Donets River. (39) Only the arrival of three additional Soviet armies enabled the Soviets to stabilize the front at this point.

Manstein's limited counter-offensive had robbed the Red Army of the initiative which it had essentially enjoyed in this theater since November, 1942. Army Group South claimed 40,000 Soviet casualties and the destruction of 600 Soviet tanks and 500 Soviet guns. (40) The Germans now had undisputed control of this region bounded by the Donets and Mius Rivers much as they had in the winter, 1941. Finally, Manstein's well conceived operational maneuver had preserved his Army Group South.

#### INTELLIGENCE

Manstein was a superb operational commander. His grasp of the situation in the theater and his ability "to see" the battlefield enabled him to anticipate the moves of the Soviets.

He knew that the Soviets were attempting to cut-off the southern wing of the German Army and that they would be persistent in accomplishment of this mission. Early in January he realized that the next critical battle would be fought in the vicinity of Kharkov. Based on this understanding of his opponent, Manstein was able to develop his plan and convince Hitler to modify his strategic aims to align them with Manstein's operational capabilities. Soviet operational intelligence, to the contrary, was not as keen as demonstrated by the Soviets' failure to recognize Manstein's counter-offensive was anything more than a cover operation for a withdrawal.

#### PLAN

In order for Manstein to influence the operation, he knew that he must develop a credible reserve-- a task not easily accomplished by an army that has surrendered the initiative both tactically and operationally to an attacking force. With such an operational reserve he could adequately respond to some tactical defeats in non-critical areas as he sequenced the campaign anticipating the decisive battle at Kharkov. It was this realization of the vital importance of Kharkov in future operations which drove Manstein to decide to concentrate forces in a central position just south of Kharkov to insure his operational freedom of action.

## MANEUVER

Manstein understood operational maneuver and the many problems inherent in such large-scale maneuvers. He understood that the higher up one goes in the command structure the further out into the future he must visualize. Large units are extremely difficult to control once on the move. They require significant notice before they can move. Having this vast knowledge of large-unit operations, Manstein could visualize the theater of operations, anticipating future locations of both enemy and friendly units, and coordinate large counter-attacks such as the Second SS Panzer Corps' attack on the Soviet Sixth Army on February 19.

While during this 2-month period many corps size maneuvers and attacks were directed by Manstein, many were still essentially tactical level operations. Recognizing that the strategic aim of the Germans was to regain the initiative and to re-occupy Kharkov, the one attack which appeared to insure the accomplishment of this aim was 40th Panzer Corps' destruction of elements of Popov's Tank Group. Still another operational maneuver was the one by Hoth's Fourth Panzer Army which opened a gap between two Soviet armies and opened the way to Kharkov and Belgorod.

## SUSTAINMENT

The accounts reviewed on this campaign did not highlight any significant sustainment problems for Manstein's German Army. However, a couple of points should be made. During this period

Germany was fighting on two fronts. Fortunately for Manstein, the Eastern Front was the German priority. Secondly, Manstein seems to have realized that at the operational level the distinction between operations and sustainment grows increasingly dimmer. In other words, much of the operational commander's responsibility rests in positioning his forces properly and sustaining them. His rare sense of timing made him a master at these duties. A good example was found in Hoth's Fourth Panzer Army's two-day operational pause to regroup prior to launching its attack between Merefa and Sokolovo. While many commanders are prone to forget the tremendous logistical tail which must follow large units, Manstein remained aware of this essential support which allowed his combat forces to be so effective.

## V. Impressions From Operational Level Exercise

While historical examples provide an opportunity for the study of actual operations of the past, exercises enable the students to be direct participants in an operation and therefore learn through experience. Such exercises allow the students to confirm or deny propositions developed from studies of the past.

The recent School of Advanced Military Studies (SAMS) Southwest Asia exercise conducted at Fort Leavenworth (41) provided an excellent opportunity for students to participate in the planning and executing of the tactical and operational levels of war. As members of the fictitious Indian Ocean Command, a joint headquarters, our strategic guidance was to eliminate the existing rebel threat to the Iranian government, keep the Straits of Hormuz open to protect U.S. and other international maritime and economic interests in the Persian Gulf, protect Bandar Abbas and adjacent land areas against hostile Soviet forces, and reestablish control by the legitimate Iranian government. To accomplish these tasks, we had a Joint Task Force (JTF) consisting of a U.S. field army with two corps, a USMC Marine Amphibious Brigade (MAB), and some air and naval forces. U.S. forces were initially concentrated in three Iranian ports: Bushehr, Bandar Abbas, and Chah Bahar.

Based upon our initial intelligence reports, Soviet forces were postured along the northern Iranian border in both the northwest (Transcaucasus Front) and northeast (Turkestan Front) and were preparing to attack. Additionally, the Soviets could

utilize some of their forces currently occupying Afghanistan in a supporting attack from the east. However, this option was thought to be unlikely. Aware of the vast deserts and mountain ranges which the attacking Soviet forces would be forced to negotiate in their move from both the northwest and the northeast, we concluded that their center-of-gravity was probably the logistical support structure required for such a long maneuver. Similarly, the ports which were so vital to our continued resupply and reinforcements, appeared to be the friendly center-of-gravity.

Based upon this operational intelligence, the commander and staff developed the plan. U.S. forces in the west at the port of Bushehr would move north and take up defensive positions generally along the line between Esfahan and Yazd. Those forces at Bandar Abbas would move north generally to defend in the vicinity of Kerman. Marine forces at Chah Bahar would likewise move north to assist in the defense of Kerman, particularly from Afghanistan in the east. Full advantage would be taken of mountain passes and any other chokepoints in the desert where enemy forces would be canalized allowing small friendly elements to hold-off much larger attacking forces. Air assets would interdict Soviet lines of communications. Specifically, in an effort to sequence the campaign, air assets would interdict heavily the forces moving down from the northwest to slow their progress while friendly forces tried to defeat the attacking forces from the northeast first. In this manner, if we could deal first with the northeast threat, we could then turn to the

northwest when Soviet lines of communications would be likely to be very long and fragile and conduct a counterattack into the enemy flank.

During the actual execution of the operational plan, it became painfully apparent how difficult operational maneuver is to coordinate to insure the massing of maximum combat power at the decisive point. Corps and larger units require significant time to move on the battlefield. Throughout a campaign, planners must be anticipating both enemy and friendly moves to maintain a sensing for what the theater will look like in several days. Our efforts to think through the problem and sequence the campaign through the notion of preconceived maneuver enabled our units to remain "pointed in the right direction." Had such sequencing not been thought through and expressed in an operational plan, large-scale counterattacks or other maneuvers would be doomed to failure.

While this exercise certainly did address logistical requirements and associated problems, it remained difficult to gain a true appreciation for the real impact of logistics on a campaign. While perhaps a corps running out of fuel in a counterattack would make a strong impression, such a blatant example did not take place in the exercise. However, we knew that because of our long sea lines of communications and limited points of entry to the country, the loss of Bandar Abbas would be a war stopper and we therefore protected this obvious center-of-gravity.

In this manner, the operational commander in conducting the defense was dependent upon accurate intelligence, a sound plan for sequencing events, maneuver to conduct the counterattack, and sustainment. A focus on these four areas provided a structure to this large-scale operation or campaign.

## VI. Conclusions

A cursory investigation of FM 100-5 initially gives the impression that a significant number of linkages between the tactical and operational levels of war are not suggested in the manual. Obviously, there exists no laundry list on a particular page to which one could turn. However, as one delves deeper into the manual, it becomes apparent that numerous functions are suggested to exist at both levels thereby providing a linkage. For example, initiative, agility, depth, and synchronization are all said to exist at both levels. This seems to imply that these basic doctrinal tenets serve to link the two separate and distinguishable levels of war, tactical and operational.

Numerous others were in some way suggested. The four elements of combat power --maneuver, firepower, protection, and leadership-- were all described as existing at both levels. Some of these are more easily understood as existing at multi-levels than others. For instance, protection is evidently needed at the tactical level as small units engage in battles but becomes more difficult to grasp and appreciate at the operational level. As the operational commander develops the campaign plan, his focus should not be on "protecting the force" as is the case with the tactical commander. Firepower is still another example of a tactical commander's concern which does not necessarily translate to the operational level of war. The operational commander focuses on the movement of large units to gain positional advantage on the opponent rather than on the

development of firepower. Sustainment and intelligence are also described in the manual at both levels. Therefore, some could argue that FM 100-5, in an attempt to sell the operational level of war to the U. S. Army at large, might have over exaggerated the existence of these multitude of functions at both levels.

The historical examples reviewed in this paper and recent map exercises suggested the existence of only four major linkages or bridges between the tactical and operational levels of war. These four linkages appear to transcend the tactical level into the operational level and provide a structure to war at the operational level. These four linkages seem to best enable the operational commander to transform tactical results into operational success.

Intelligence surfaced quickly in all cases. The operational commander must understand the opposing commander's intent in addition to other such information as enemy forces, locations, etc which are pursued by tactical commanders. He must understand if his opposing commander consistently attacks without regard for logistical support as did Rommel or if he is attempting to cut his lines of communications and isolate his force. Through operational intelligence, the enemy center of gravity should be identified so that the commander can properly focus his effort.

Armed with this information, the operational plan or campaign plan should be developed. In the plan, the commander must express his intent. The campaign plan should focus on the unhinging of the center of gravity of the enemy force. Such a

plan should only be deviated from reluctantly. At the operational level, commanders should not allow fleeting tactical gains or losses to cause significant alterations to the plan. The ability successfully to alter a plan diminishes as the size of units involved increases. Through this well conceived operational plan focusing on the destruction of the enemy center-of-gravity and concurrently on the preservation of the friendly center-of-gravity, the commander conveys his leadership capabilities. Afterall, his intent should not be to lead from the front and influence the current fight, but instead to be at a location which enables him to grasp the entire situation. His focus must be forward in both time and space. Rommel's personal battlefield leadership probably contributed to many of his tactical victories while he lost the fight operationally. As a contrast, Manstein did not appear to ever allow himself to become overwhelmed by the current fight but instead kept his focus forward.

Once the enemy center of gravity has been identified, through operational maneuver the commander can focus the main effort against this center of gravity. In other words, through operational maneuver the commander can economize in least threatened sectors accepting some risk while concentrating the effort at the decisive point. If executed properly and if based on sound intelligence, the operational commander thus protects his force. While at the tactical level, maneuver can often be executed with little advance notice, operational maneuver involving large units generally must have been preconceived in

the plan. Commanders must anticipate enemy moves so that maneuver by operational size forces can be set in motion early. Once such motion has begun, it is extremely difficult to halt or even alter this movement. These units are far too large to be agile.

Commanders designing such large operational maneuvers must insure that they are properly sustained. Logistics personnel must insure that they thoroughly understand the long-range plan to include its sequels and branches. Essential in their support efforts is an understanding of movement of large units and the time required. They must be able to accurately project usage rates of various supplies and keep the commander aware of expected problem areas which could ultimately preclude the execution of the operational plan. Rommel's North African campaign provided an excellent example of the consequences of improper operational sustainment.

The above four areas, intelligence, planning, sustainment, and maneuver represent viable linkages between the tactical and operational levels of war. In other words, if a person were trying to walk from the tactical step to the operational level step, these represent verified passable terrain whereas some others suggested in FM 100-5 do not. To insure that tactical results are translated into operational success, operational commanders should focus on these. Further, these key ingredients of the operational level of war provide a structure of war at this level. While countless other functions may be peripherally related to the operational level of war, these four

represent the true cornerstones of this level of war.

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41. Exercise conducted by School of Advanced Military Studies students and faculty during Fall 1985, at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. Exercise was one of several conducted throughout the SAMS academic year ranging from company level to a NATO Exercise.

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